



THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE KARIN/ERZERUM REGION

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The city of Karin/Erzerum and the region to its north, historical Tayk or Tao, are studded with medieval monuments, including churches, monasteries, and fortifications. These buildings, and the decoration that adorns them, are of key importance in understanding the complex religious and cultural world of Armenia. In the Middle Ages, the population of the region was decidedly heterogeneous, comprising Armenians, Georgians, Seljuk Turks, and Greeks, and the buildings attest to such diversity. Often bearing multilingual inscriptions, they elude easy classification into discrete styles such as "Armenian" or "Georgian." It is perhaps for this reason that they are often excluded from general surveys of Armenian art. Yet these works deserve attention precisely because they challenge the notion of a monolithic and homogeneous Armenian architecture. The research of Robert Hewsen,¹ Nina Garsoïan,² Michael Stone,³ and others has demonstrated the ethnic and religious diversity of medieval Armenia, and the monuments of the Erzerum area provide eloquent testimony to

¹ See Robert H. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), and a series of articles by the same author titled "Introduction to Armenian Historical Geography," in *Revue des études arméniennes*, n.s., 13, 17, 19, 20, 21 (1978-79, 1983, 1985, 1988-89, 1990-91): 77-97, 123-43, 54-84, 271-319, 174-83.

² See Nina G. Garsoïan, *L'église arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), and "Armenia in the Fourth Century: An Attempt to Re-Define the Concepts of 'Armenia' and 'Loyalty'," *Revue des études arméniennes*, n.s., 8 (1971): 341-52.

³ Excavations now underway in Armenia under the direction of Michael Stone have uncovered the remains of a Jewish cemetery. Publications are forthcoming.

this position. Hence, seeking out the "Armenian architecture" of the region is probably too rigid an approach. Instead, this discussion will consider a selection of monuments that are tied to the Armenian tradition in a variety of ways. An examination of this group, which includes four churches, a fortress, and Seljuk tomb towers, will demonstrate that medieval Armenians did not remain aloof from their neighbors but rather participated actively in the cultural exchanges that characterized the region.

Church Architecture in Tayk/Tao

Banak

One of the best-known monuments of the group is the church of Banak (Bana; Penek), lying half-ruined on an arid plain some distance to the northeast of Erzerum (Fig. 1).⁴ The date of its foundation is a matter of debate: some scholars have maintained that it was constructed in the late-ninth to early-tenth century during the reign of King Adarnase II of Georgia (890s-923).⁵ Others, however, including Josef Strzygowski, Tiran Marutyan, and W. Eugene Kleinbauer, have suggested an initial date of the second half of the seventh century, followed by a subsequent period of restoration.⁶

The church holds particular importance for the development of Armenian architecture, as it belongs to a family of buildings

⁴ For a historical overview and bibliography for the region, see *Armenian Architecture: A Documented Photo-Archival Collection on Microfiche for the Study of Armenian Architecture*, a multi-volume microfiche collection of Armenian monuments (Zug, Switzerland: Inter Documentation, 1980-1990), cited hereafter as *Armenian Architecture*. The set, which is available in a number of American research libraries, was created under the direction of Vasken Parsegian and edited and written by Krikor Maksoudian and several associates. For the area of Erzerum and medieval Tayk/Tao, see vol. 6, fiches 1-61. For an up-to-date list of readings about artistic and sculptural programs in the region, see Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

⁵ The secondary literature on Banak is quite abundant. For commentary and further reading, see *Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-2125, D2, and W. Eugene Kleinbauer, "Zvart'nots and the Origins of Early Christian Architecture in Armenia," *Art Bulletin* 54 (1972): 251ff.

⁶ *Armenian Architecture*, vol. 6, A-2125, D2-D3.

commonly referred to as the “double-aisled tetraconch,” in which the domed core is screened from an outer ambulatory by means of columnar exedrae (Fig. 2).⁷ The most famous representative of the group is the seventh-century church of Zvartnots,⁸ but other buildings of the same type include the church of Gregory the Illuminator at Ani, Lekit in historical Caucasian Albania, and a series of fifth-century and sixth-century monuments in Syria and Mesopotamia.⁹

In its dimensions and plan, the church of Banak finds a close parallel in Zvartnots.¹⁰ Yet a number of innovations may also be perceived. For example, the dome is thought to have been erected on an open arcade of columns rather than on a solid drum. Moreover, while the east apse of Zvartnots is defined by solid wall, at Banak it is formed by a fourth columnar exedra (Fig. 3). Finally, between Banak’s exedrae are small apsed chambers accessible at the west. Within the thickness of their walls are flights of stairs leading to additional upper chambers, and these walls also serve to support the dome. At the Zvartnots church, this space is occupied instead by solid W-shaped piers. All of these changes serve to lighten the structure, and suggest that the designers of Banak felt confidence in the structural integrity of the building. In a sense, this sentiment was warranted, for unlike other buildings of the same type, at least part of the first two levels at Banak remains standing.

The building is embellished with rich sculptural decoration, carved, like the structure itself, in local tufa. The columns of the exedrae were surmounted with capitals of an Ionic basket variety, in which the base of the capital is encircled with thick bands of sculpture in a woven design (Fig. 4). Above are Ionic volutes, which flank two rows (one upper and one lower) of bead-like motifs. The style of the sculpture has led some scholars to posit an initial seventh-century phase for the church, and some scholars

⁷ Kleinbauer, “Zvart’nots,” p. 251.

⁸ For a recent study of Zvartnots, see Christina Maranci, “Byzantium through Armenian Eyes: Cultural Appropriation and the Church of Zvart’noc’,” *Gesta* 40:2 (2001): 105-24.

⁹ For further discussion of this architectural group, see Kleinbauer, “Zvart’nots,” and his “The Aisled Tetraconch,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Princeton University, 1967).

¹⁰ In diameter, Banak measures approximately 37 meters (120 feet).

have drawn parallels with the Ionic capitals at Zvartnots. Eugene Kleinbauer¹¹ and Dora Piguet-Panayotova,¹² for example, suggest that the capitals date from the seventh century and were re-used in the present building.

Ishkhan

The church of Ishkhan (Prince) is located in the district Tortum to the north of Erzerum (Fig. 5).¹³ According to Maksoudian, its name refers to the fact that the area belonged to the House of the Mamikonians in the fifth century. Unlike many of the medieval monuments in the area, Ishkhan is mentioned in a number of primary sources that form a complicated and rather confusing chronicle of the building history. The seventh-century account of Sebeos associates the site with Catholicos Nerses III, referring to Ishkhan as his birthplace. Sebeos also relates that Nerses returned to the area during a period of exile in 653-58. The tenth-century Georgian historian Georgi Mertsuli also casts Nerses as the builder of the church, and in the history of Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi, Nerses is presented as the former bishop of Tayk.¹⁴

Nerses' putative connections with the church have led scholars to a number of hypotheses regarding its date and present state. Some believe that the current structure is a later rebuilding and

¹¹ Kleinbauer (p. 251) believes that "the style of the carved frieze of the ground-floor walls [and] the schematic treatment of the leaf forms calls to mind mid-seventh century sculpture in Armenia. The large spiral forms of the capitals also recall the carved elements of Zvart'nots, but the quite unclassical capitals supporting horse-shoe arches in the east conch may be replacements of the beginning of the tenth century, when the church was rebuilt."

¹² Dora Piguet-Panayotova, "Recherches sur les tetraconques à déambulatoire et leur decor en Transcaucasie au VII siècle," *Oriens Christianus* 73 (1989): 166-212.

¹³ Like Banak, much has been written on this church, and bibliography can be found in *Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-2081, A1. In particular, see Mine Kadiroğlu, *The Architecture of the Georgian Church of Işhan* (Frankfurt and New York: P. Lang, 1991); Wachtang Djobadze, *Early Medieval Monasteries in Tao, Klarjeti, and Saveti* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1992), pp. 191-217; Dora Piguet-Panayotova, "L'église d'Işkhan: Patrimoine culturel et création architecturale," *Oriens Christianus* 75 (1991): 198-253.

¹⁴ Ibid.

that the original seventh-century church resembled Nerses' foundation of Zvartnots, a double-aisled tetraconch.¹⁵ These scholars, moreover, argue that the initial structure was destroyed during the Arab invasions and then rebuilt in the ninth century by the Georgian bishop Saban.¹⁶ Krikor Maksoudian and Tiran Marutyan, however, argue that the bishop only engaged in renovations of the first church. Nikolai Tokarski believes that Ishkhan was rebuilt in the tenth century by Prince David *curopalate*, in imitation of another royal foundation. The tenth-century church of Oshk, a large domed cruciform structure also located in the Tortum area (Fig. 6).¹⁷ A group of wall paintings, seen by Ekvtime Takaishvili in 1917 but now lost, argues for a tenth-century phase of activity at the church and connects it with three royal Georgian figures. The images depicted three men inscribed with the names Adarnase, *curopalate*, son of Bagrat; Bagrat *magistros*, king of the Kartlians; and Bagrat, *eristav* of *eristavs* (prince of princes), son of Adarnase. From this information, Antony Eastmond and others have concluded that the paintings must have been executed after 958, at which time Adarnase III received the title of *curopalate*.¹⁸ Because the paintings no longer exist, however, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions regarding the date and founder of the structure.

It is also not clear whether the church was founded and used by Georgians or by Armenians of the Chalcedonian faith, of which there was a sizable population in Tayk. Numerous scholars, including Takaishvili and Eastmond, assume it is a Georgian

¹⁵ Nikolai Tokarski and N.P. Severov are among those holding this view. For a further discussion of the secondary literature, see *Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-2081, A-2.

¹⁶ Another renovation is attested by a Georgian inscription on the interior of the church, which relates the refurbishment by Archbishop Antonius in 1032 (*Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-2081, A-3).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, p. 227, writes that "the paintings must have shown Bagrat' I *magistros* and titular king of Kartli (937-945), the third son of Adarnase II, standing between his son Adarnase III (958-961) and his grandson Bagrat', *eristav* of *eristavs* (961-966)," and concludes that "since Adarnase III only received the title of *kuropalates* in 958, after the death of his uncle Sumbat', the paintings must have been executed after that date, at least eighteen years after the death of Bagrat' I."

monument. Maksoudian, however, asserts that the presence of Georgian epigraphy attests rather to a congregation of Armenians who professed Chalcedonianism, noting that they referred to themselves as "Georgians" and often knew Georgian. Moreover, he points out the continuity of an Armenian presence in the region, as witnessed by the seventeenth-century Armenian cleric-geographer Hakob of Karin, who described the inhabitants of the region as speakers of Armenian and ethnically half-Armenian and half-Georgian.¹⁹

For the present purpose, it is more important to explore the role of Ishkhan within the history of building traditions in Armenia and, in particular, its peculiar physical characteristics. The church now stands in the middle of a farming village in a state of semi-dilapidation. However, enough remains of the building to discern its elevation. Built on a stepped platform, Ishkhan bears a domed cruciform plan, with a long western arm crossed by a shorter lateral arm under the dome (Fig. 7). The method of dome support is particularly intriguing: the shell-shaped niches above the piers give the impression of squinches; however, they are actually spherical triangles (pendentives), to which a sculptural design typical to squinches has been applied (Fig. 8).²⁰ The northwest end of the church is occupied by a long, barrel-vaulted chamber, which, like the nave, is accessible by a portal on the west facade. According to Takaishvili, at the south side of the west arm stood an open portico, but no remnants of it now remain.²¹ In the main aisle, large, profiled pilasters run up the sides of the walls to form transverse arches for the barrel vaults above. In the central bay, the dome is supported by four thick shafts; the western pair are cruciform piers of complex profile, while the eastern are polygonal. The abundance of profiling, which articulates the walls, vaults, and supports of the structure, lends the interior an elegant linear effect, typical of churches in the region.

¹⁹ *Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-2081, A-2, A-3. In addition, Maksoudian (6, A-2081, A7) notes Amiranshvili's discovery of Armenian and Georgian epigraphy in the main church as well as images of both Armenian and Georgian royal figures.

²⁰ Contrary to Maksoudian's view, *Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-2081, A6.

²¹ *Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-2081, A4.

The interior of Ishkhan was once highly decorated. There is evidence that the walls were completely plastered to create a smooth surface for painting. Remains of the program still survive on the eastern apse, the western end, and in the dome, and are dated by most scholars between the ninth and tenth centuries. Elaborate architectural sculpture adorns the exterior. As at other churches in Tayk, the walls are covered by a system of blind arcading, and windows are surrounded with intricately sculpted frames (Fig. 9). The window frames of the west elevation, for example, feature interlaced bands of geometric motifs, and arched lintels are ornamented throughout with abstract decorative designs. The tympanum of the south portal, which bears a Georgian inscription, is decorated with an unusual pattern resembling waves, and on the surrounding archivolt is a geometricized rinceau (scroll) inhabited by elephants, rabbits, lions, and winged beasts (Fig. 10).

The most intriguing element of the church is the eastern apse, which is flanked by a side chapel to the south, and presumably once also by a chapel at the north. Instead of a solid curve of masonry, the apse is made up of an exedra of columns which screen a straight wall (Fig. 11). Thick and sturdy, the columns support an arcade of horseshoe arches and are adorned with a variety of capital types. Scholars who argue that the present structure of Ishkhan partially preserves Nerses' original foundation point directly to this arrangement and liken it to the columnar exedrae of Zvartnots. It is their contention that this element was original to the seventh-century structure and subsequently incorporated into the new church.

Yet there are a series of problems with this thesis. First, one may point out that many of the capital types used in the eastern exedrae at Ishkhan are far more stylized than those of Zvartnots, featuring large, generalized plant forms, and schematic Ionic capitals, in which the volutes are reduced to two large rosettes (Fig. 12).²² It is also noteworthy that, unlike at Ishkhan, Zvartnots did not possess an exedra in its east end; rather, the apse was a solid wall. Such an architectural change is by no means trivial,

²² One or two columns do survive with more volumetric proportions, however, which may form part of a rebuilding.

as the apse was the locus of the liturgy and would certainly correspond primarily to functional requirements. Until the absolute and relative chronologies of Zvartnots, Ishkhan, and Banak are made clear, these questions must remain.

Khakhu

The Monastery of Khakhu is situated on the flank of a mountain, surrounded by lush fruit-bearing and flower-bearing trees (Figs. 13-14).²³ Functioning today as a mosque, the complex was originally dedicated to the *Theotokos* (Bearer of God). A precise date and an identification of the religious and ethnic identity of the patron and initial congregation have not yet been established. Some scholars argue that Khakhu was an Armenian monophysite foundation built in the early 860s. Certainly an Armenian presence is attested by an inscription of mixed Armenian and Georgian characters that was detected on the interior of the east apse in the nineteenth century.²⁴ Nikolai Tokarski notes the bareness of the interior walls, suggesting that it was built by monophysite Armenians, who were disinclined, he asserts, to adorn churches with images.²⁵ Marutyan adds that the simplicity of the plan of Khakhu is in keeping with traditional Armenian architecture.²⁶ Maksoudian also argues that the foundation was monophysite Armenian but bases his opinion on Georgian literary sources, specifically two texts that mention the foundation of Khakhu: *The Georgian Royal Annals* (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*) and the *Geography of Vakhutsi*.²⁷ In the former, the church's foundation is credited to the curopalate David and placed in the second half of the tenth century. The latter source does not mention a date, stating that the church was built by "the curopalate David, the stepfather of King David."²⁸ Maksoudian argues that the latter source does not refer to the tenth-century David but rather to an epony-

²³ For further commentary and bibliography, see *Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-2050, B2ff.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, B3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, B2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

mous curopalate who ruled in the late ninth century. He uses epigraphic evidence to support this claim: in the nineteenth century, Nerses Sargisian discovered an inscription on the east wall of the church and deciphered from it a tentative date (in Armenian) of 862. Hence, Maksoudian places the foundation of the church in the 860s. In these years, he suggests, the construction of a monophysite foundation would have been quite conceivable, for the Council of Shirakavan, summoned by Ashot Bagratuni in 862, "established a *modus vivendi* between the Chalcedonian and monophysite Christians of Transcaucasia."²⁹

This seems to be the strongest argument in favor of identifying the church as a monophysite foundation. By contrast, Tokarski's argument based on the absence of images at Khakhu is difficult to support, for not only are traces of wall painting actually preserved at the church, but one may also note that numerous medieval Armenian churches bore painting programs.³⁰ Marutyan's belief that the "simplicity" of the plan indicates Armenian monophysitism is equally problematic, as the layout of Khakhu is in fact quite complex. The greatest challenge to the argument of an Armenian monophysite foundation is the strong link to the tenth-century curopalate David, as attested to by the *Georgian Royal Annals*. Indeed, most scholars credit the foundation of Khakhu to David and date it to 975. Yet, given the presence of Armenian epigraphy at the church, one may also propose a connection to Armenians, perhaps adhering to the Chalcedonian faith.

The architectural features of the church deserve careful attention.³¹ Surrounded by a circuit wall, the complex includes three chapels in addition to the main church. Most interesting is the architecture of the latter. In its attenuated dimensions, empha-

²⁹ Ibid., B3.

³⁰ This is true even in seventh-century foundations such as Talin, Ptghni, and Lmbat. Churches continue to bear painted decoration in the tenth century and onwards. For example, the programs of the monasteries of Datev, Dadivank, and, perhaps the most striking example of all, the elaborately painted interior of the Church of Gregory the Illuminator at Ani.

³¹ In addition to its architecture, the monastery is also known for the famous Khakhuli triptych, now located in the Museum of Fine Arts in Tbilisi, which frames an ancient icon of the Virgin composed of Byzantine and Georgian enamels.

sized by a tall, steeply pointed roof, it is typical of tenth-century and eleventh-century building in Transcaucasia. Moreover, in its domed cruciform plan (Fig. 15), the structure resembles the nearby church of Ishkhan. The east end is relatively simple: the apse, decorated with blind arcades, is flanked by two deep side chambers accessible by barrel-vaulted lateral arms. The central dome, supported by squinches, is preceded at the west by three aisles, separated by piers. A series of annexes, believed to be of later date, surround the main body of the church. The north aisle communicates with a long, barrel-vaulted side chamber, and a second room, of similar proportions, stands at the south. This area is accessed through a door in the south aisle and features an open arcade on its south wall, giving entry to a courtyard. A chamber precedes the nave at the west of the church. Relatively narrow in proportion and covered by barrel vaults supported by a pair of columns, it resembles a typical Byzantine narthex. Yet unlike its Byzantine parallels, it does not communicate with the exterior of the church. An additional chamber stands at the corner between the southern portico and the western room, and a small apsed chapel is located just to the east of the portico.

In all these features—the presence of a barrel-vaulted chamber, the use of applied shafts and stepped profiles, the asymmetry of the supports, and the portico on the south side—the church forms part of a larger family of buildings in Tayk/Tao, including the churches of Ishkhan and Oshk. In particular, it is the complexity of the plans that is distinctive. Indeed, tenth-century architecture in Greater Armenia is also distinguished by the introduction of new spaces, particularly side chapels, *gavits* (antechambers to monastic churches), and upper stories. However, in these churches, the chambers are generally laid out within a geometric perimeter wall. In the churches of Tayk, the exterior profiles are often asymmetrical; hence, the church plans suggest aggregations of discrete chambers rather than unified conceptions. Why this type emerged in the northwest region of historical Armenia is uncertain; however, if the churches are Chalcedonian foundations, the layout might attest to the particular exigencies of the dyophysite rite, as it had evolved by the tenth century and

beyond.³²

The decoration of Khakhu is equally striking. On the interior, remnants of the paintings of a *Deesis* scene (Christ flanked by the Virgin and John the Baptist) and portraits of the apostles appear in the apse. On the exterior, huge cornices are suspended in the thickness of the wall, from which project sculpted animal heads. Blind arcades coat the outer walls as well as the tall, twelve-sided drum, which features long, narrow windows with arched lintels on alternating sides (Fig. 16). The frames of the lower elevation windows are particularly ornate, bearing polychrome voussoirs. On the south elevation, the main window is also decorated with twisted colonnettes and a stylized vegetal pattern on its lintel (Fig. 17). An eagle appears above the window carrying a hare in its talons, a subject that also occurs on the south facades at Oshk and the thirteenth-century chapel at Eghvard.³³

As one of the focal points of the church, the southern portico is heavily decorated with relief sculpture, as seen in the large bunches of grapes adorning the capitals of the arcade. Most interesting, however, are the tenth-century scenes within the portico. On the south wall of the church, an image of the Theotokos appears holding the Christ Child and flanked by angels.³⁴ The south portal is entirely framed by scenes (Fig. 18). On the right, starting from the bottom, is a cat-like creature, an eagle or peacock-like bird, and a scene of Jonah and the Whale, the latter depicted as a fierce and toothy feline. Just above this image stands a saint with a large key in his left hand, with the Armenian uncial *G* carved at his right. There is debate on the identity of the figure; Marutyan believes it is Gregory (hence the *G*), while Maksoudian concludes that as the third letter of the

³² It would be particularly important to compare these layouts with contemporary Georgian buildings, as well as Byzantine structures in the vicinity of Trebizond.

³³ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery of Medieval Georgia*, p. 230, suggests that this form might be a heraldic sign of the Georgian kings, but it is important to point out that it occurs with great frequency in Armenian foundations as well.

³⁴ Maksoudian, *Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-2050, B5, writes that the Virgin's image was still venerated at the beginning of the twentieth century by Muslim women wishing to conceive children, and he points out that such a practice has a long history in Armenia (and, we might add, elsewhere in the medieval world).

Armenian alphabet it refers to the Trinity.³⁵ Given the prominence of the key, however, it is most probably that the figure should be identified as Peter. On the left side of the portal, starting from the top, is a damaged scene of a haloed figure battling a serpent, a *simurgh* (a mythical winged beast, part-bird, part-lion in form), and two animals in combat. In the tympanum are four angels carrying the cross. Certain elements of the program are familiar, such as the scenes of animal combat, the biblical episode, and the *simurgh*, which is a frequent theme of medieval textiles. In its arched composition, however, the portal sculpture more closely resembles the canon tables of illuminated manuscripts.

Varzahan

The church of Varzahan, which no longer survives, was located near the city of Baberd, now Bayburt, and dated to the twelfth century.³⁶ Although unknown to medieval sources, the church does figure in the accounts of nineteenth-century travelers. Small and domed, Varzahan was octagonal on the exterior, while the interior space was defined by eight conches, of which the easternmost formed a horseshoe-shaped apse (Fig. 19). The other conches curved inward only in the upper elevation, and each was flanked by slender octagonal shafts, which formed the support for an arch-rib. The structure was illuminated by a pair of narrow windows in each of the conches, with three openings in the eastern apse. Three doors, located on the west, north, and south, provided access to the interior.

In the 1840s, the church still stood, as is attested by the account of English Assyriologist Austen Henry Layard.³⁷ En route to Nineveh, he visited the site and wrote an account of his impressions of the architecture and paintings. Layard also made a drawing of the exterior, which was highly decorated, featuring

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See *Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-3077, A8, for further discussion and bibliography.

³⁷ Austen Henry Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon, with Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert* (London: John Murray, 1853).

triangular niches with blind arcading, pointed arches, twisted colonettes, and polychrome voussoirs (Fig. 20). Most of the church survived into the early twentieth century as shown in the illustrations of Walter Bachmann, who journeyed through the region in 1911 (Figs. 21-22).³⁸ What is most important perhaps is Layard's commentary, which is significant for the historiography of Armenian architecture. One of the first to note the Western-looking features of Armenian architecture, Layard remarked that the decoration "calls to mind the European Gothic of the Middle Ages" and suggested that from Varzahan was "probably derived much that passed into the Gothic."³⁹ The author's observations on the structure convinced him of the important role of Armenian architecture in the development of Gothic architecture:

The architect, or traveler, interested in the history of that graceful and highly original branch of art . . . should extend his journey to the remains of ancient Armenian cities, far from high roads and mostly unexplored. . . . He would discover almost daily, details, ornaments, and forms, recalling to his mind the various orders of architecture, which, at an early period, succeeded to each other in Western Europe and England.⁴⁰

The often striking parallels between Armenian and Gothic architecture have been a matter of debate for more than a century and a half. The topic, which is extremely complex, has been treated recently by the present author.⁴¹ For the purposes of this overview, it is simply important to note that Varzahan was the first monument to raise European awareness of Armenian architecture and to call attention to its often intriguingly Western features.

³⁸ Walter Bachmann, *Kirchen und Moscheen in Armenien und Kurdistan* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich: 1913), Table 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴¹ Christina Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture: Constructions of Race and Nation* (Louvain: Peeters, 2001).

*Forts and Tomb Towers:
Other Architectural Traditions of the Erzerum Area*

The area of Erzerum is also one of the most densely fortified areas of historical Armenia. Numerous fortresses line the mountain passes of the regions of Olti (Oltu) and Artvin, which have been studied extensively by Robert Edwards.⁴² He has argued that the presence of certain physical features often reveals the identity of the fortresses' builders. He also observes that Armenian fortifications display several unique features that offered particularly effective defense against intruders. This may be seen in the fortress of Olan, in the Olti-Penek area (Figs. 23-24).⁴³ The Olan cloister is not geometric in its perimeter wall, but rather conforms to the outline of the mountain on which it stands (Fig. 25). This feature, Edwards notes, makes optimum use of the natural defenses of the mountainous topography, which was often marked by spurs and jagged cliffs. Olan also possesses a bent entrance, which, according to Edwards, is another characteristic of Armenian fortification architecture. Forcing a momentary hesitation before the turn, the bent entrance renders attackers vulnerable to soldiers positioned on upper wall-walks. A third important element protects Olan: rounded wall towers, or bastions, which are common to Armenian military architecture and extremely useful during sieges. Lacking corners, these structures discourage sapping, a term referring to the technique of excavating the corner of a structure to cause it to topple. In its layout and defensive features, the Olan cloister is representative of many other fortifications in the vicinity of Erzerum. In fact, as Edwards himself attests, a number of Georgian fortifications, such as those of Shavshat, Ardahan, and Artvin, also feature rounded towers and non-geometric plans, which suggests, as do the area churches, active relations between the two communities.

Cross-cultural interaction can also be observed within the city

⁴² Robert W. Edwards, "Medieval Architecture in the Oltu-Penek Valley: A Preliminary Report on the Marchlands of Northeast Turkey," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39 (1985): 15-37.

⁴³ See *Armenian Architecture*, 6, A-2122, A2.

of Erzerum in three Seljuk tomb towers (Fig. 26).⁴⁴ Dating to the tenth and eleventh centuries, the tombs are small, single-unit structures, each consisting of a square chamber capped by a dome and tall, conical roof. Hence, in their configuration, they almost exclusively recall the centrally-planned churches of the Caucasus. The presence of such architectural ideas in a Muslim context might seem rather surprising to the modern spectator, but such cultural exchange can be detected frequently in the medieval monuments of the Near East. One may note that Armenian architecture also appropriated ideas from Islamic architecture: multi-faceted *muqarnas* vaults, for example, are incorporated into the Armenian decorative vocabulary by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Erzerum tomb towers hence offer important evidence that for the Armenian and Muslim inhabitants of the area, architectural ideas could transcend political and religious boundaries.

The monuments discussed above raise more questions than they provide answers. Building histories, foundation dates, and the identities of founders or builders remain, in many cases, unclear. What is certain, however, is that the medieval monuments of the area were not produced in a vacuum but rather participated in a lively exchange among communities of different ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds, including Armenian monophysites, Armenian Chalcedonians, Georgians, Byzantines, and Seljuks. Evading easy classification into modern categories of race and nation, the architecture of the Erzerum area invites us to rethink our notion of the field. Rather than an insular and narrowly circumscribed tradition, the monuments offer a more complicated picture of Armenian architecture, in which architectural production was informed not only by internal forces but also by the process of cultural exchange.

⁴⁴ For further discussion and bibliography on Seljuk tomb towers, see David Stronach and Thomas C. Young, "Three Octagonal Seljuk Tomb Towers from Iran," 4 *Iran* (1966): 1-20.

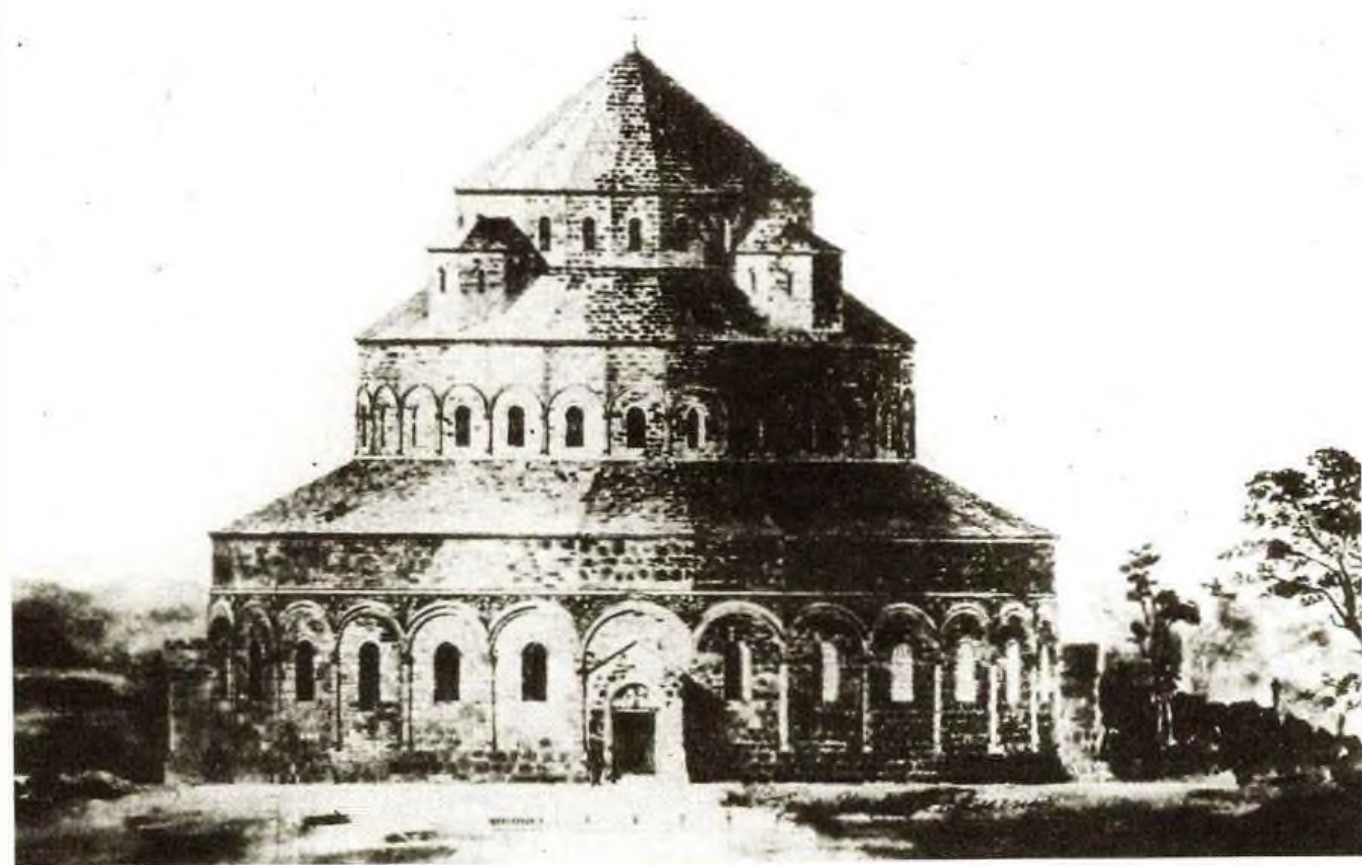


Fig. 1. Banak: Reconstruction by A. Kalgin



Fig. 2. Banak: Interior, Looking into Ambulatory

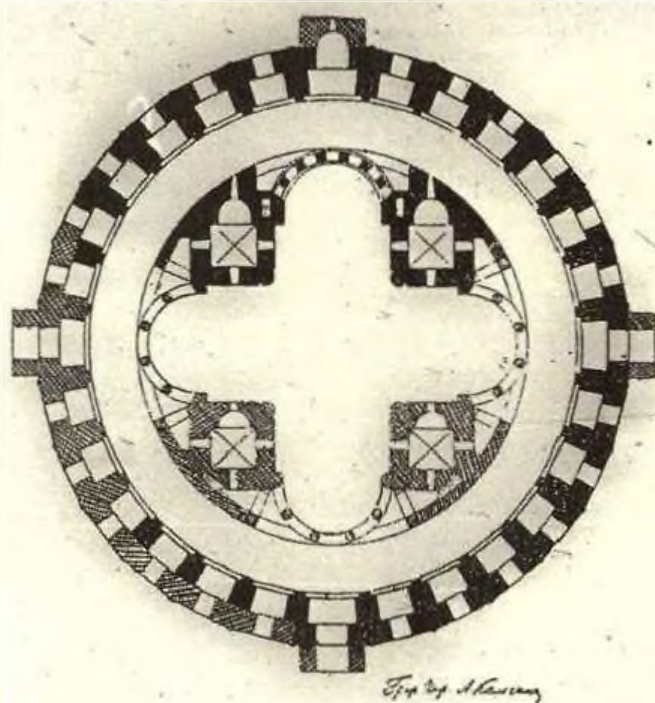


Fig. 3. Banak: Plan, after A. Kalgin



Fig. 4. Banak: Capital of Exedra



Fig. 5. Ishkhan



Fig. 6. Oshk

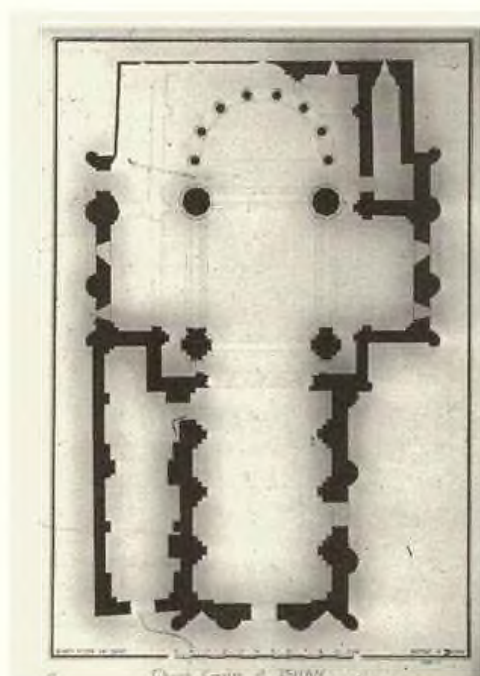


Fig. 7. Ishkhan: Plan, after R. Mertens

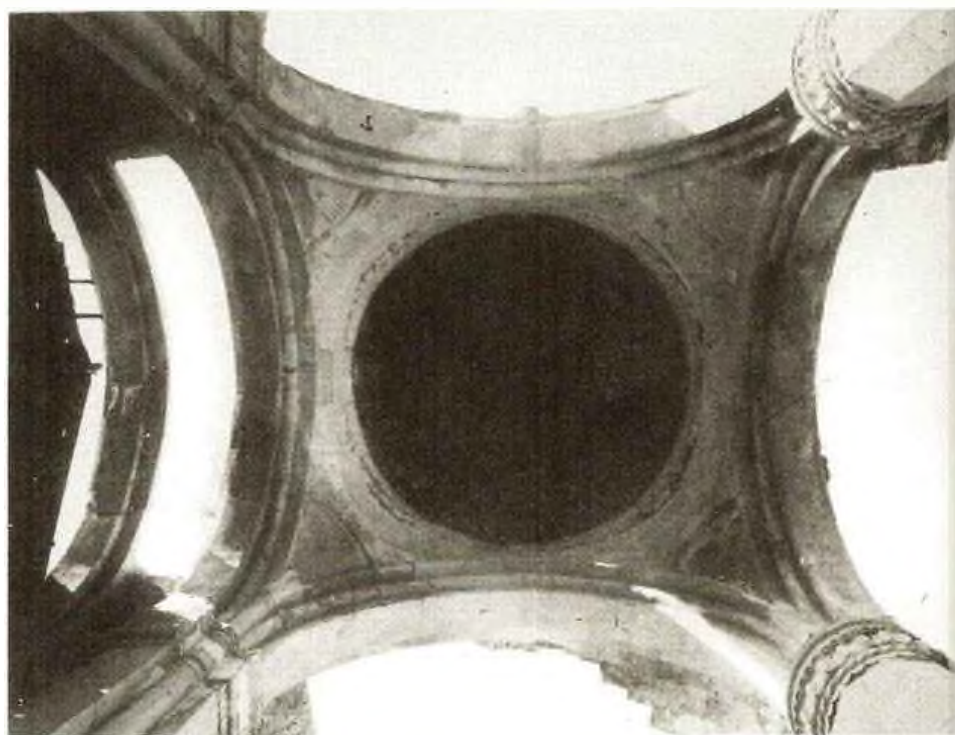


Fig. 8. Ishkhan: Interior, Dome



Fig. 9. Ishkhan: West Elevation, Window Frame

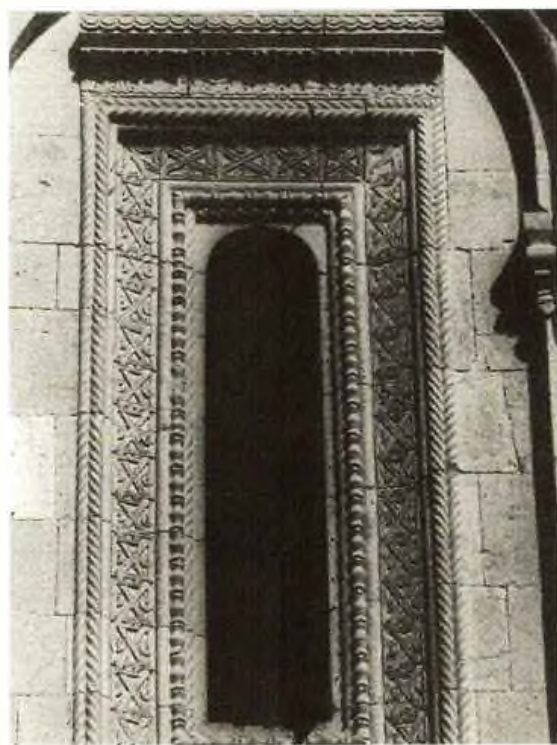


Fig. 10. Ishkhan: North Portal, Tympanum



Fig. 11. Ishkhan: Apse



Fig. 12. Ishkhan: Apse, Arcade Capital



Fig. 13. Khakhu: Rendition by Theophile Deyrolle



Fig. 14. Khakhu

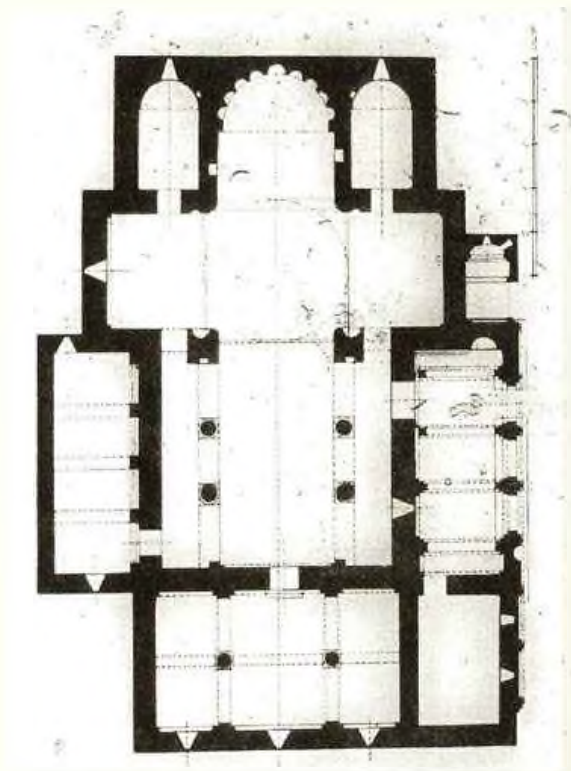


Fig. 15. Khakhu: Plan, after A. Kalgin



Fig. 16. Khakhu: Drum and Dome

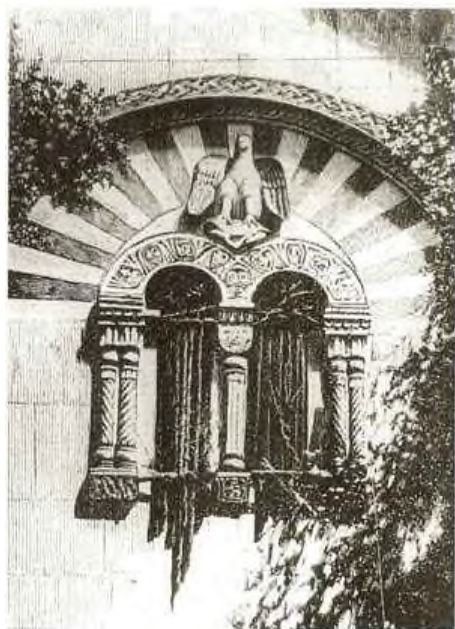


Fig. 17. Khakhu: South Elevation, Window

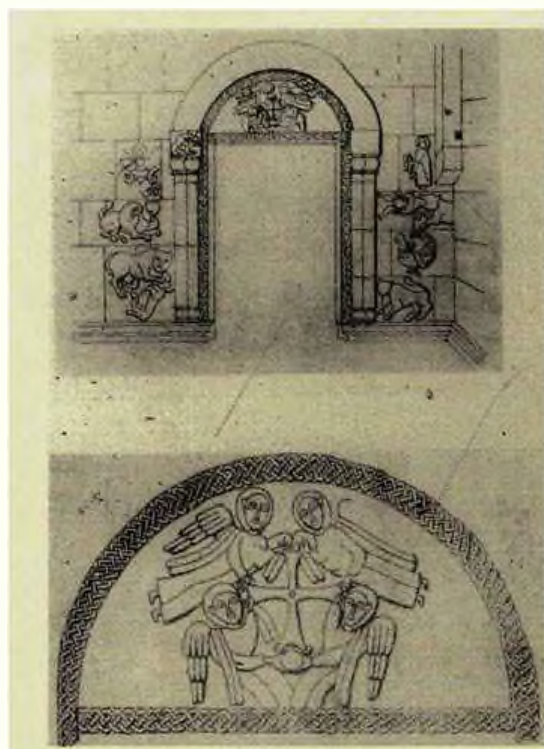


Fig. 18. Khakhu: South Portico,
Portal Decoration, after David Winfield

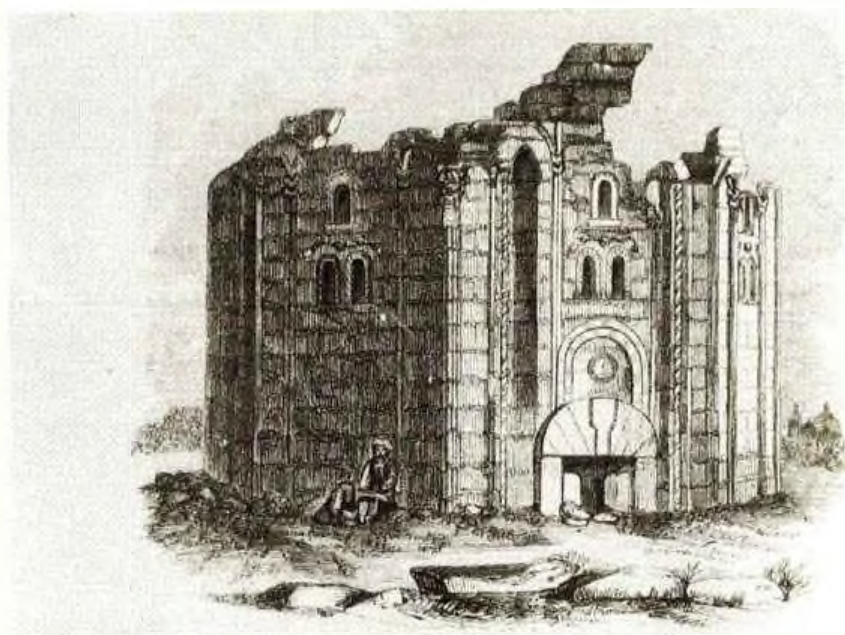


Fig. 19. Varzahan: Drawing, 1840s, after A.H. Layard

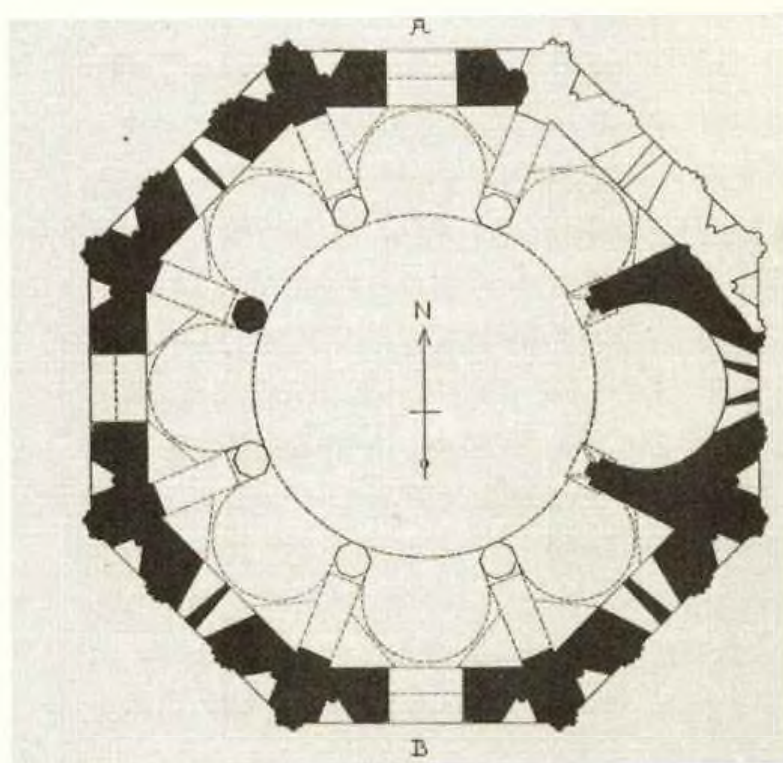


Fig. 20. Varzahan: Plan, after Walter Bachmann



Fig. 21. Varzahan, 1911



Fig. 22. Varzahan Cemetery Monuments



Fig. 23. Olan Cloister

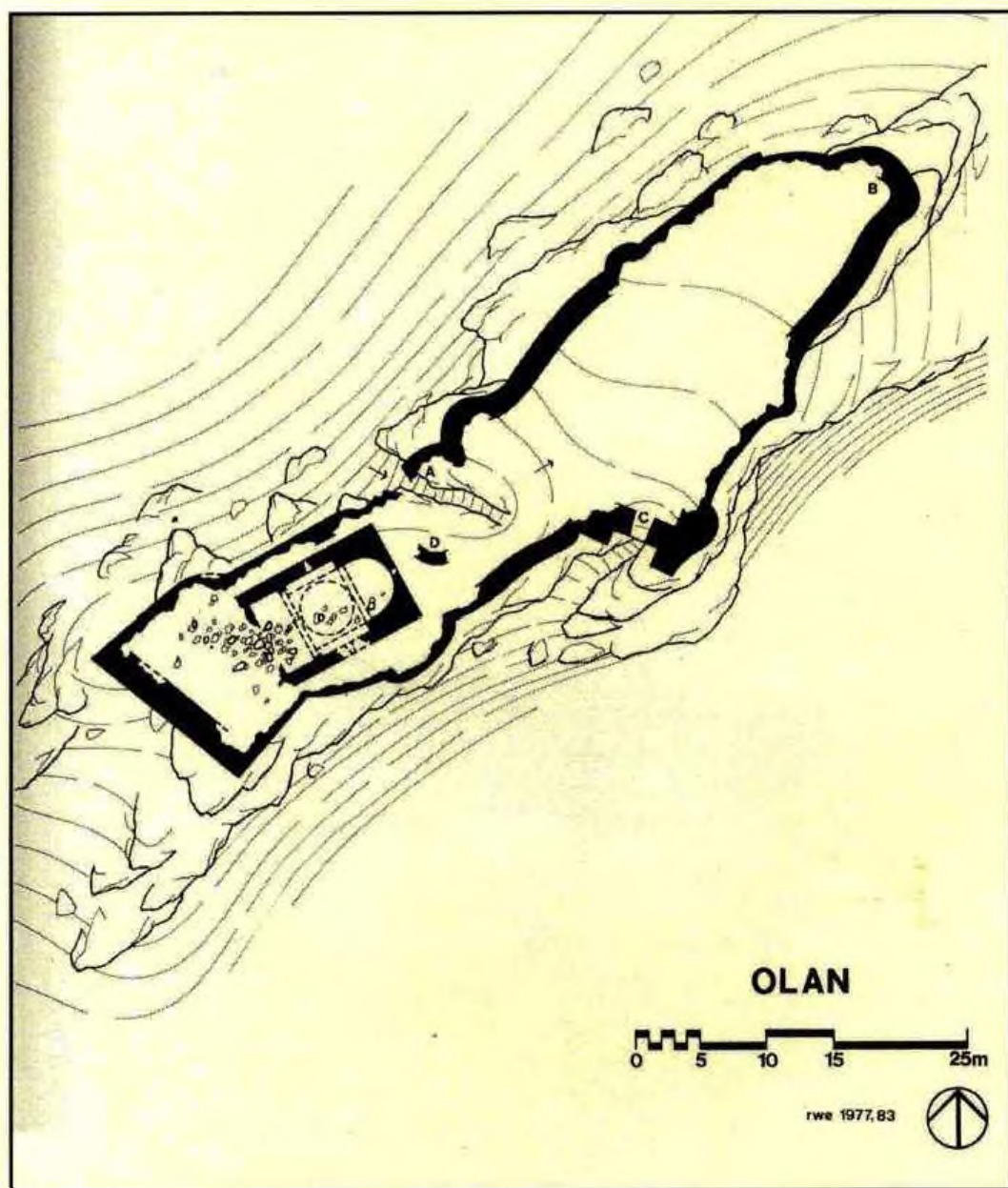


Fig. 24. Olan Cloister: Plan, after Robert Edwards



Fig. 25. Olan Church

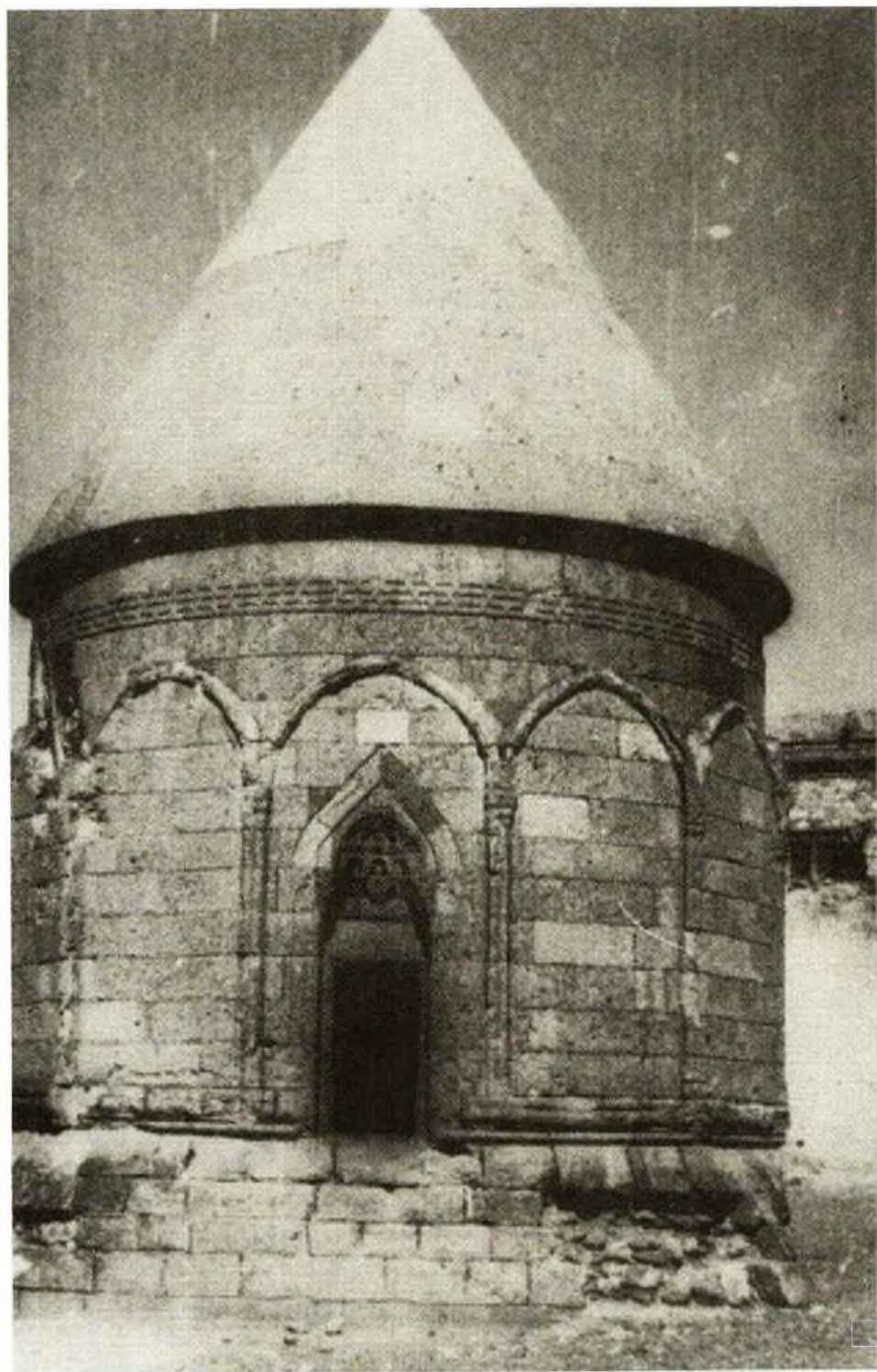


Fig. 26. Erzerum: Tomb Tower